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A SERMON

by

Rev. Silvanus Hayward, D. D.

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Matthew XI, 19. Wisdom is justified by her works.

These are the words of Jesus concluding what he was saying to his disciples about John the Baptist, just after John had sent to inquire, "Art *thou* he that should come or look we for another?" He rebuked the people for their unjust criticism of both John and Himself. "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, he hath a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" And then adds "And wisdom is justified by her works."

The general criticism of public men, in the talk of the crowd, is as worthless and ill-founded, as their estimate of John and Jesus, mere shallow flings at some impressions of outside appearances, and not in any sense an intelligent judgment as to character. This is what every one must expect who comes before the public, especially, if in the capacity of an instructor or admonisher, trying to lead them to what is right and good. Their usual course is to *find fault* at all hazards; with *one* for being too rigid and stern, and with the next for being too easy and reckless of exact truth and righteousness. So they hate the former and despise the latter. In the long run, however, the last is far more likely to win favor than the first. More than half a century of observation has convinced me that by far the larger part of all dislike, and unkind speech about preachers and others who are trying to help the world grow better, is because they speak out against individual and society sins. "Prophesy unto us smooth things" is the almost universal demand of listeners to any kind of instruction, whether from pulpit or lecture platform. Those who yield to such demands are simply pusillanimous cowards, or as the Scripture says, "dumb dogs that cannot bark". Such cannot be men of God nor *manly* men, even in the lowest conception of these terms. Whatever be the course taken by *true* men, it will be criticised, even as were

both John and Jesus. That is, whether it be the forerunner sent to announce the coming of the Lord of light and life, or even that blessed Lord himself. Both calling men to repent and come into the approaching Kingdom of God, though differing in outward forms of life, were one in spirit and character, and in the ultimate trend of their instructions. They were equally straight, true and outspoken. Whoever at heart was the follower of the one, could not reject the other. Tradition points out John as an eminent patron of Freemasonry, and Jesus exalted John as the equal of the highest among men, and at a word, brushing aside all the criticisms of men, he announces the true test, in the words of the text, "Wisdom is justified by her works", or as we have it in the common version, "Wisdom is justified of her children". Both being substantially the same, showing that the shallow criticisms ordinarily uttered are worthless. The only substantial basis of judgment, is in the life and character of those who obey the instructions of Wisdom or Folly. Or, as He has said in another place, "By their fruits ye shall know them". Every person and every organization, even the church itself is to be rightly judged by its works.

Brethren, I do not propose to enter upon any formal and elaborate defence of our Order. It would not be in place. Nor is it needed. In spite of all obstacles it has stood and flourished for unquestionably three thousand years. If we are only true to our principles, the sturdiest blows of all enemies will fall as harmless as the strokes of an infant's hand upon the time-tried cliffs of Gibraltar. But it may be somewhat interesting and not unprofitable to both ourselves and others, briefly to refer to a few points worthy of notice.

There is a somewhat numerous class of considerable intelligence, who regard secrecy as an insuperable objection to any society. They say, for substance, "If your ceremonies and instructions are interesting or valuable, throw them open to the world; let us all understand them. The principle of secrecy is all wrong. Whatever is for the good of men should be thrown open to their gaze. No bolts or bars should block the way of those who desire to obtain knowledge." This has a plausible sound. But it is entirely fallacious. For look the universe through, and secrecy is the rule and not the exception. Secrecy finds a legitimate place in all the ramifications of human society. As God has made the human soul, every human being is a series of concentric circles, cell within cell, the outer of easy access, but entrance to the others none can force. First comes the outer circle of mere acquaintance.

Even this, we can close, if we will, against all comers. Next comes the circle of friendship, where only dear friends find themselves at home. Then comes the circle of *family* love, closed to all the world beside. Then the charmed circle of love between *two alone*, a circle into which a third profane foot may never intrude, and no sacrilegious eye may ever gaze. In the healthy soul, all these concentric circles are firmly closed with barred doors, which open never, save to those possessed of the proper pass-words and credentials. And still farther within, beyond all these, *every* man, however honest, simple and open-hearted, has a secret shrine, a "*sanctum sanctorum*", from which all but God himself are sacredly shut out. Nor even, if he would, can any one throw open the doors of this "holy of holies" which God has framed into the very constitution of man, and has retained the key in his own possession. Thus God has made every human being to be a series of secret vaults, one within another, admittance to which, no finite power can compel. Society is everywhere permeated with secrecy and mystery. Souls drift together from far off lands, look into each others' faces, and depart unrecognized and unknown, or otherwise, having a common secret, by some mysterious signal unknown to others, come closer together, and are separated no more. Eyes flash secrets into other eyes never before met, and hands clasping hands receive some token that reveals a mysterious bond hidden from all the world beside. He who leaves out one element of the human soul, in attempting to help mankind, is so far weak and unwise. Secrecy has for all men, in all ages, a fascination irresistible, and sometimes terrific in its power. No age and no type, either of barbarism or civilization, has been without its secret mysteries. Mysteries innumerable thread the records of the farther East, and pervade the gorgeous richness of their fascinating literature. Egypt is emphatically a land of mystery. Forever hidden from mortal ken are the forbidden secrets, hinted at in her silent Sphynx, her singing Memnon, her mute pyramids, her marvelous vaults, and painted chambers of imagery. Eleusis, and Delphi, and Dodona whisper of the secrets of ancient Greece, where even the purest and wisest philosophers veiled their best teachings in mysteries unknown, save to the initiated few. As we move down the stream of Time, and Egypt and Greece recede into darkness, in the Latin and Germanic races we find still the mystic rites of secrecy all over Europe, from the sunny plains of Italy, to the snowy mountains of Scandinavia, and the chilling fogs of our own mother isle. Vestal or Bacchanal, Vehmich or Druidic, pure or impure, secret and mysterious ceremonies were practiced from

the most remote to the most modern times of European history. Nor is this secrecy associated, as some might be ready to suggest, with the heathen alone. But when Jehovah would establish a people separate and peculiar to Himself, He made the most sacred *secret* place for His own visible glory, their rallying point, for all important occasions. He appealed to this instinctive love of secrecy which himself had put into the heart of man, and declaring clouds and darkness to be round about Him, prepared a secret mercy-seat to be seen by only one person in a generation, and by him only with the most carefully prescribed ceremonies, once in each year. God thus put His own seal upon secret rites aside from the like teaching of His works and Providence.

All Nature is also full of mysteries. There is no royal road to her treasury. He who would learn her secrets must ask and knock long at her double-bolted gates. Step by step, he can pass from one degree of knowledge to another, only as he is duly and truly prepared to receive her truths. He who would win her treasures must always pay the price. This is the law of God's universe. Secrecy and silence, twin-born, presided at the birth of creation, and mystery is stamped upon its every fiber. He who *seeks with all his heart* shall indeed find. He who desires light above all things else, shall behold it. But Nature's doors are always locked against the careless and the unworthy. He who with pure heart would tread her tessellated floors, will often find his way resisted, guarded doors bar his progress, and he must meet many obstructions in his passage towards the Fountain of Light. But to him who presses on with fervency and zeal, every now and then comes a time, when, of a sudden, doors long closed fly open, and unexpectedly he receives the knowledge he has long desired. Every careful student of Nature, every great thinker earnestly seeking for truth has often experienced that which he can best describe in the sacred words, "God said, Let there be light! and there was light." Nor can he impart the knowledge to another. Nor can it be imparted, save in the way and manner in which he received it. It is only by carefully traveling the same road, always straight and narrow, often rough and rugged to the foot-sore and the weary, that any can obtain the privilege of beholding the same light, and receiving the same instructions. In traversing the dominions of Jehovah, in crying after wisdom, and searching for her as for hid treasures, at every turning the mysterious Isis still declares, "no mortal has hitherto taken off my veil"; at each vision of light, just as we begin to congratulate ourselves on having gained the goal, there comes the thrilling ques-

tion, "Hast thou heard the secret of God?" But when we begin to fall back in discouragement and despair, there comes again the assuring voice, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." No better emblem of universal Nature can be found than the figure of Silence with listening ear, and warning finger upon the closed lips. All secrets of both the material and spiritual dominions of Jehovah wait only for the worthy and persistent applicant. To such it is everywhere proclaimed, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Thus the Institution which celebrates this day, is, in its fundamental principles, in accord with universal Nature and Providence.

But you all realize that a preacher's duty is not so much to defend, as to instruct and exhort, and to warn of the dangers which beset us all. This is, of course, the work of a life-time, so I can mention only a few, such as threaten and harm every moral or beneficent institution, even the Church itself. One great peril to any such organization, and one which I fear very few ever think of, is to connect it as a body, even on festal occasions, with amusements or diversions which any respectable portion of the community disapprove. I imply nothing *here* as to the real character of these things. They may be harmless for you to indulge in individually. *That* is not *now* to be considered. But it is a great mistake to have the name of the Order connected with any such entertainment, however harmless and right for you or me personally. This is an important point for every society, which is, I suspect, almost never thought of by any. There are many things which I should not hesitate to engage in, at home, or in others' homes, which nevertheless, I should consider ill-advised, and likely to be seriously harmful to any organization, under whose name they should be presented to the public.

Still further, some think amusements and entertainments should be employed to attract young men to join our Order. Brethren, I speak plainly, for I feel strongly. It seems to me subversive of the fundamental principles of Masonry, to try to hold out any inducements for others to come. A young man who wishes to join us because he thinks we have a good time, and therefore it will be a jolly good thing to be with us, is utterly unprepared to become one of our number. We desire, or should desire, only such as wish to share the instructions of morality, and friendship, and brotherly love we offer to every one who really seeks them.

Surely Masonry has enough in itself, in its noble principles, and its impressive rites to attract and hold all truly prepared

hearts. I have attended many festive assemblies, banquets, or whatever social Masonic gatherings, and have enjoyed some of them very much, yet I can say with emphasis, that put them all together, they do not compare in real satisfaction to me, with one well-conducted service of induction into the rites and ceremonies of our Order.

It goes without saying, that few things are so injurious to any organization, as careless guarding of the outer doors. If we would have our Order strong, honored, and efficient, we cannot too carefully investigate the character of those who apply, nor too rigidly exclude the unworthy.

The great weakness of all Societies for helping the community, is that the members fail to live up to the principles they profess. So, brethren, I am sure not one of us will deny for himself, that he is apt to be too careless, forgetting at times to practice out of the Lodge, the excellent precepts inculcated in it. "Wisdom is justified by her works." So if our lives conform to the principles we profess, no enemy can prevail against us, and the excellent honor and reputation of the institution which produces such characters, will be firmly established; and the customary taunt, "What do ye more than others?", will vanish as an empty sound. But if men see that we forget Brotherly Love and Truth, if we remember not the reverence due to the great and sacred name of God, if temperance, purity, and justice are not the virtues that adorn our lives, they will reproach not us merely, but more the Order which our lives dishonor. Forty-six years experience leads me to think it would not be easy to find one among us who, if able, would refuse to help a worthy brother in time of need. But, alas! I have known some who have ill-treated, and even abused their brethren by word and deed. And I fear, brethren, there are few of us but must confess ourselves less careful than we ought to be, to guard our brother's reputation as our own. "He that sins not with his tongue, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."

And you will please notice, I do not speak of these dangers as at all peculiar to us, but the same perils beset every organization, especially in these last few years, when according to the testimony of observers everywhere, all seem to be seeking more and more after mere pleasure and excitement, entirely apart from the purposes for which they profess to be established. Many of you are members of the Church of Christ, and I am sure that you will testify that Churches are not exempt from the same perils, and especially that they are always strong or weak just in propor-

tion as their members live what they profess. And exactly the same is true of every society. Our Lord gives the key to the whole difficulty, when he says, "No man can serve two masters." Belonging to any organization need not prevent your personal participation in many other things. But when acting in the capacity of a member of that body, you should seek only its professed purposes. In its corporate capacity, that is, as a body, every society should give itself wholly to its own work. Amusements and recreations, which we all need, should, as a rule, be kept apart from association with the name or activities of any society, whether organized for industry, or culture, or friendship, or religion.

Brethren and friends, as a minister of the Gospel of the Living God, I cannot close without saying that the great peril of every individual is in accepting something less than Jesus Christ and Him crucified, as sufficient for salvation. Every passing year of my life adds emphasis to this supremely central fact. "Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." And I know I can safely call on those of you who are Church members, to testify that there is nothing in our teachings or ceremonies in any degree inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus. Indeed every one who from the *heart* fully receives our "great light", even the Word of God, which we everywhere hold forth as the basis of our belief and practice, cannot long be satisfied to remain aloof from the Church, or fail to join himself to the company of the disciples of Jesus. He will come to see and feel that although John was greater than all who went before, yet as Jesus declared, "He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." So though I believe profoundly that our Society to which John belonged, is by far the greatest and best merely *human* organization ever instituted, yet the smallest and feeblest *true* Church of Christ is far greater. And as no one can attain the privileges and understand the symbols of our Order without guidance and instruction, so amid the darkness and difficulties of our life-journey through this world, we can never find the light, or reach the threshold of the heavenly gate, except by implicitly following Jesus as our divinely appointed Guide and Instructor. And I think I cannot close better than with a few lines in which I have endeavored to suggest to those who have received our light how some of our symbols rightly received and appreciated, will help the seeking soul nearer to Him, our only Supreme Lord and Master.

Brethren :—

Who shall pass our guarded door
To view the beauties there?
Who shall tread the checkered floor
Around our blazing star?

Who shall breathe the noble vow
To keep the true and right?
Who shall at our altar bow
Among the sons of light?

He that asks, to him is given;
He that seeks shall find;
He that knocks, shall win from Heaven
A light to guide the blind.

Who upright and just shall stand
Clad in apron white?
Who shall join our brother band,
And share our holy light?

He that heavenward lifts a prayer
In every path that's trod;
He that doth his *heart* prepare
To love and trust his God.

He shall find a faithful friend,
Trusty, true and tried,
Prompt a brother's aid to lend,
His steps in safety guide.

He shall learn the sweets of love,
How pleasant and how good
Dews descending from above
To bless the brotherhood.

He shall learn to pity those
Whom poverty subdues,
Aid to grant a brother's woes,
Nor e'er his suit refuse.

He shall view the sacred light
From off the altar shine;
Jewels rich shall greet his sight,
With square, and plumb, and line.

Ashlar rough shall show his heart
Unpolished, hard, and rude ;
Ashlar smooth, by heavenly art
The same with Love subdued.

He shall see the starry gate,
Where Jacob's ladder stands,
Where the white-robed angels wait
With blessings in their hands.

Climbing still the radiant slope
Upon the bars of gold,
Charity, and Faith, and Hope
His clasping hands shall hold.

He shall serve his Master well,
His orders swift obey ;
Freedom, Fervency and Zeal
His active hands display.

Winding stairs, seven, five, and three,
His feet shall reach at length,
Pillars two, and pillars three,
Wisdom, Beauty, Strength.

Orders five he shall behold,
Senses, the gift of Heaven ;
From East to West still onward rolled
Science and Arts are seven.

He shall ford the living stream
To feed on corn and wine ;
Bright upon his eyes shall beam
The Craftsman's sacred sign.

Pressing onward towards the East
To hear of David's wars,
He shall watch, while others feast,
And breathe adoring prayers.

He shall learn with firmest faith,
In manhood, age, and youth,
In paths of life, or vales of death,
To keep the word of truth.

Fallen column shall declare
How frail the life of man.
And the virgin weeping there
O'er Beauty's broken plan.

Lessons of eternal Truth,
As taught by seer and sage,
Shall restrain the fire of youth,
And light the hopes of age.

Blindly through whate'er betide,
Alternate joy and woe,
Trusting in a Heavenly Guide
Safely shall he go.

Treading still the fatal path
Leading to the tomb,
Yet above decay and death
Evergreen shall bloom.

He who passed that way before,
And the victory won,
He shall ope the pearly door,—
God's beloved Son!

He shall pluck the veil away
From the blinded sight,
And the holy realms display
Of eternal light.

There the idle and profane
Never shall be known,
But the *faithful* shall attain
To stand before the throne.

Brothers, let us trust our *Guide*,
Till *our* feet He bring,
Walking by His blessed side,
To wait before the King!

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